DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 247 991 JC 840 503

AUTHOR Howard, William; And Others
TITLE Study of Students Who Withdrew from Courses at the Hawthorne and Northeast Centers, 1982-1983. Volume XIII, No 1.
INSTITUTION William Rainey Harper Coll., Palatine, Ill. Office of Planning and Research.
PUB DATE 14 Sep 84
NOTE 17p.; For earlier study, see ED 233 765.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; *Dropout Attitudes; Dropout Rate; Dropout Research; *Dropouts; *Enrollment Influences; *Off Campus Facilities; School Holding Power; Two Year Colleges; *Two Year College Students; *Withdrawal (Education)

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at William Rainey Harper College to determine why off-campus students withdrew from courses at Hawthorne Center (HC) and Northeast Center (NEC). A total of 391 students who withdrew from degree credit classes and continuing education classes at HC in fall 1981, and from classes at NEC in fall 1982 and 1983 were sampled and surveyed. Study findings, based on return rates of 78% to 89% for degree-credit students and 63% to 77% for continuing education students, included the following: (1) the withdrawal rate of degree credit students attending NEC (27%) was higher than that for the college population as a whole (14%); (2) the principal reasons for withdrawing given by degree credit students were job pressures, inconvenient location, and ineffective instructors; (3) the primary reasons given by continuing education students were course objectives not related to needs, job pressures, personal problems, and inconvenience of course time of day. (4) only 38% of the degree students who dropped at least one course at NEC withdrew completely, and 86% of them planned to return to the college; (5) 76% of the continuing education students who dropped courses at NEC withdrew from college completely, and 67% had plans to return; and (6) among degree credit students withdrawing from NEC classes, 70% reported never having seen a counselor, while among all degree credit dropouts at the college, only 44% reported never having seen a counselor. Detailed results and the questionnaire are included. (LAL)

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Volume XIII - No. 1

September 14, 1984

WILLIAM RAINEY HARPER COLLEGE
OFFICE OF PLANNING AND RESEARCH

ED247991

STUDY OF STUDENTS WHO WITHDREW FROM COURSES AT THE HAWTHORNE AND NORTHEAST CENTERS 1982 - 1983

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JC 840 503

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ABSTRACT

THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY WAS TO DETERMINE WHY STUDENTS WITHDRAW FROM COURSES AT OFF-CAMPUS CENTERS (HAWTHORNE FIRST AND NOW THE NORTHEAST CENTER). SOME 400 DEGREE CREDIT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION (NON-ESL) STUDENTS FROM THESE TWO CENTERS WERE SAMPLED AND SURVEYED FROM THE FALL SEMESTERS OF 1981 THROUGH 1983. AFTER AN INITIAL MAILING AND APPROPRIATE FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES WERE IMPLEMENTED, RETURN RATES RANGING FROM 63 PERCENT TO 89 PERCENT WERE ATTAINED THUS ASSURING REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY RESULTS.

THE WITHDRAWAL RATE OF DEGREE CREDIT STUDENTS FROM THE NORTHEAST CENTER (27%) WAS MUCH HIGHER THAN THE WITHDRAWAL RATE FROM THE GENERAL HARPER STUDENT POPULATION (14%). THIS APPEARS TO BE CAUSED BY THREE PRINCIPAL FACTORS: INCONVENIENCE OF LOCATION, COURSES TAUGHT ALMOST ENTIRELY BY PART-TIME FACULTY AND LESS ACCESS TO STUDENT DEVELOPMENT STAFF (COUNSELORS).

THE PRINCIPAL REASONS MOST OFTEN GIVEN BY DEGREE CREDIT STUDENTS FOR WITHDRAWING FROM COURSES AT THESE TWO OFF-CAMPUS CENTERS WERE JOB PRESSURES, INCONVENIENT LOCATION AND INEFFECTIVE INSTRUCTORS. CONTINUING EDUCATION STUDENTS DROP FOR A SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT MIX OF REASONS: PRIMARILY, THEY CITED COURSE OBJECTIVES NOT MEETING STUDENT NEEDS, JOB PRESSURES, PERSONAL PROBLEMS, AND INCONVENIENT COURSE TIMES.

AMONG THOSE DEGREE STUDENTS WHO DROP AT LEAST ONE COURSE AT THE NORTHEAST CENTER, ONLY 38 PERCENT WITHDRAW COMPLETELY FROM HARPER AND EVEN AMONG THESE STUDENTS, 86 PERCENT PLAN TO RETURN TO HARPER. ALMOST THREE-FOURTHS OF THE CONTINUING EDUCATION STUDENTS WHO DROP COURSES AT THE NORTHEAST CENTER WITHDRAW COMPLETELY FROM HARPER BUT AGAIN TWO THIRDS OF THESE STUDENTS PLAN TO RETURN TO HARPER SOON.

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to determine why students withdraw from courses at off-campus centers (Hawthorne first, and now the Northeast Center). The study was requested by William Howard, Director of Continuing Education and Program Services and the staff at the Northeast Center. This is an offshoot of an earlier study on the characteristics of students who attended or are attending classes at these two centers.

POPULATION SURVEYED

Students who withdrew from degree credit classes and continuing education classes in the fall of 1981 at the Hawthorne Center and in the fall of 1982 and 1983 at the Northeast Center were sampled and surveyed. No ESL classes were included in the samples. After the original mailing of the survey and appropriate follow-up procedures, the following return rates were achieved:

	HAWTHORNE CENTER		NORTHEAST CENTER			
			Fall 1982		Fall 1983	
	Degree Credit PCT	Cont. Educ. PCT	Degree Credit PCT	Cont. Educ. PCT	Degree Credit PCT	Cont. Educ. PCT
Mail Responses	38.9	34.8	46.4	43.2	40.2	21.3
Telephone Responses	38.9	28.2	42.9	34.1	47.4	53.2
Sub-Total Respondents	77.8	63.0	89.3	77.3	87.6	74.5
Non-Forwardables	3.7	17.4	10.7	4.5	2.1	5.3
Refused to Answer	1.8	4.4	0	11.4	1.0	1.1
Unable to Reach	16.7	15.2	0	6.8	9.3	19.1
Sub-Total Non-Respondents	22.2	37.0	10.7	22.7	12.4	25.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample Size	54	46	56	44	97	94

As can be seen from the table, a 78 to 89 percent return rate was obtained for degree-credit students while a 63 to 77 percent rate was achieved for continuing education students. A much higher return rate was attained on the Northeast Center students. This was probably due to the timing of the survey. The Hawthorne students were surveyed about one year after they withdrew while the Northeast Center students were polled only two months after they withdrew. Interestingly, the survey response rate among those who withdrew was as high as that attained from students who were polled in the earlier characteristics survey. The response rate is high enough to insure that the withdrawals who responded are representative of all the withdrawals.

METHODOLOGY

The surveys in the appendix were developed jointly by the staff at the NEC and the Office of Planning and Institutional Research. The survey of students

attending classes at the Hawthorne Center was mailed to their homes August 7, 1982, and those not responding were mailed a second survey 3½ weeks later. Over the next six months those still not responding were telephoned and information was obtained over the telephone. For the NEC surveys, the selected students received their questionnaire in the mail some time after December 6 of the fall in which they were enrolled. One month later a second mailing was made to the non-respondents. Those still not responding were surveyed over the telephone in the next two-month period. Additional information was gathered from student files and data obtained in this study was compared to an earlier study of students who withdrew from all degree credit classes at Harper.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Student record data indicated that the student withdrawal rate at Northeast Center (27%) was much higher than the withdrawal rate for the whole college (14%). The withdrawal rate for continuing education students is 15 percent at the Northeast Center. No comparable data is available for college-wide continuing education students.

The higher withdrawal rate among degree-credit students at the Northeast Center appears to be caused by three factors. One factor is that the location is inconvenient for many students. Among the withdrawals at Northeast Center, almost 14 percent give this as the primary reason for dropping while among all students at Harper withdrawing, less than one half of one percent give this as the primary reason. The second factor is that at the off-campus locations almost all courses are taught by part-time faculty which leads to more complaints about ineffective teaching. At the Northeast Center, 13 percent of the students said their primary reason for withdrawing was because of an ineffective teacher while overall at Harper among all withdrawals only 7 percent gave this as a primary reason. The third factor is that fewer students at the off-campus locations ever see counselors. Among degree-credit students withdrawing from courses at Northeast Center, 70 percent report never seeing a counselor while among all degree-credit drops at Harper, only 44 percent report never seeing a counselor.

Looking at withdrawals from the Northeast Center, the three primary reasons for dropping given most frequently by degree-credit students were job pressures (15%), inconvenient location (13½%), and ineffective instructor (13%). Considering continuing education students at both centers, the primary reasons for withdrawing given most frequently were course objectives not relating to student needs (20½%), job pressures (14%), personal problems (13½%), and times were too inconvenient (13%).

At the Northeast Center, over 38 percent of the degree-credit students who drop at least one course withdraw completely from Harper while among continuing education students this proportion is over three-fourths. Considering those Northeast Center students who do withdraw completely from Harper, 86 percent of the degree-credit group plans to return to Harper while 67 percent of the continuing education group plans to return to Harper.

Among those withdrawing from courses at Northeast Center, some 34 percent of the degree-credit students and 70 percent of the continuing education students registered by telephone. This is about the same proportions as for all students who register by telephone. Previous studies have shown those registering by telephone are no more apt to withdraw from courses than those registering in person.

W I T H D R A W A L R A T E S

Northeast Center versus Overall Harper

	Northeast Center				Harper - Overall Academic Year			
	Fall 1982		Fall 1983		Fall 1982		Fall 1983	
Degree Credit Classes	N	PCT	N	PCT	N	PCT	N	PCT
Total Withdrawals	326	25.8	467	27.5	5623	13.7	5857	14.5
Total Grades Given	1265	100.0	1700	100.0	40916	100.0	40386	100.0
Continuing Education Classes								
Total Withdrawals	149	15.8	210	14.0	Not Available			
Total Grades Given	941	100.0	1501	100.0	Not Available			

CONTINUING EDUCATION STUDENTS

Withdrawal Status	Hawthorne Center - Fall 1981		Northeast Center Fall 1982		Northeast Center Fall 1983	
	N	PCT	N	PCT	N	PCT
Withdrew from one course but still enrolled at Harper	1	3.7	8	23.5	16	24.2
Withdrew from more than one course but still enrolled at Harper	1	3.7	0	0	0	0
Completely withdrew from Harper	25	92.6	26	76.5	50	75.8
Total	27	100.0	34	100.0	66	100.0
If Completely Withdrew from Harper						
Plan to Return	16	76.2	18.5	74.0	30	60.0
No Plans to Return	5	23.8	6.5	26.0	20	40.0
Total	21	100.0	25	100.0	50	100.0
Last Time Student Saw A Counselor						
This Semester	1	3.6	0	0	3	4.5
Past Semesters	3	10.7	1	2.9	3	4.6
Never Saw a Counselor	24	85.7	33	97.1	60	90.9
Total	28	100.0	34	100.0	66	100.0
How Student Registered for Classes						
By Telephone	19	73.1	23	71.9	46	68.7
In Person	7	26.9	9	28.1	21	31.3
Total	26	100.0	32	100.0	67	100.0

DEGREE CREDIT STUDENTS

Withdrawal Status	Hawthorne Center Fall 1981 N	Hawthorne Center Fall 1981 PCT	Northeast Center Fall 1982 N	Northeast Center Fall 1982 PCT	Northeast Center Fall 1983 N	Northeast Center Fall 1983 PCT	Degree Credit Over-all Harper 1979-82 PCT	Degree Credit Over-all Harper Fall 1983
Withdrew from one course but still enrolled at Harper	12	28.6	28	56.0	47	55.3	67.6	71.3
Withdrew from more than one course but still enrolled at Harper	3	7.1	4	8.0	3	3.5	11.4	11.4
Completely withdrew from Harper	27	64.3	18	36.0	35	41.2	21.0	17.3
TOTAL	42	100.0	50	100.0	85	100.0	100.0	100.0
If Completely Withdrew From Harper								
Plan to return	19	76.0	14	93.3	22	78.6	71.0	77.3
No plans to return	6	24.0	1	6.7	6	21.4	29.0	22.7
TOTAL	25	100.0	15	100.0	28	100.0	100.0	100.0
Last Time Student Saw A Counselor								
This semester	4	9.8	8	16.0	6	7.1	32.6	27.6
Past semesters	11	26.8	4	8.0	25	29.4	23.9	27.5
Never saw a counselor	26	63.4	38	76.0	54	63.5	43.5	44.9
TOTAL	41	100.0	50	100.0	85	100.0	100.0	100.0
How Students Registered For Classes								
By telephone	15	35.7	18	36.0	26.5	31.2	25.0	11.9
In Person	27	64.3	32	64.0	58.5	68.8	75.0	88.1
TOTAL	42	100.0	50	100.0	85	100.0	100.0	100.0

PRINCIPLE REASON STUDENT WITHDREW FROM CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSES

Principle Reason	HAWTHORNE CENTER Fall 1981 Cont. Education		NORTHEAST CENTER Fall 1982 Cont. Education		NORTHEAST CENTER Fall 1983 Cont. Education	
	N	PCT	N	PCT	N	PCT
Course objectives did not relate to student needs	4.50	16.0	7.50	22.0	13.	19.1
Times course met proved inconvenient	7.50	26.8	5.00	14.7	8.08	11.9
Job pressures or offered a new job	4.00	14.3	5.50	16.2	7.75	11.4
Location proved to be inconvenient	3.50	12.5	2.50	7.4	7.75	11.4
Personal, Family or Illness problems	6.00	21.4	6.00	17.6	6.34	9.3
Instructor was ineffective	0	0	2.00	5.9	6	8.8
Disliked course	1.00	3.6	2.00	5.9	6	8.8
Financial problems	0	0	.50	1.5	3.83	5.6
Inadequately prepared for course	0	0	1.00	2.9	2	3.0
Course demanded too much	0	0	1.00	2.9	2	2.9
Transportation problems getting to class	0	0	0	0	1.25	1.8
Text arrived too late	0	0	.50	1.5	1	1.5
Did not like facilities	0	0	0	0	1	1.5
Class equipment not readily available	0	0	0	0	1	1.5
Registration Error	0	0	0	0	1	1.5
Cost of course was too high	.50	1.8	0	0	0	0
Was able to test out of course	1.00	3.6	0	0	0	0
Carrying too heavy a course load	0	0	.50	1.5	0	0
TOTAL	28	100.0	34	100.0	68	100.0

PRINCIPLE REASON STUDENT WITHDREW FROM DEGREE CREDIT COURSES

Principle Reason	Hawthorne Center Fall 1981		Northeast Center Fall 1982		Northeast Center Fall 1983		Harper Overall 1979-1982	Harper Overall Fall 1983
	N	PCT	N	PCT	N	PCT	PCT	PCT
Job pressures or offered a new job	10.00	23.8	8.00	16.0	12	14.1	12.7	12.6
Location proved to be inconvenient	4.25	10.1	7.84	15.7	9.84	11.6	.4	.4
Times course met proved inconvenient	3.70	8.8	2.20	4.4	9.83	11.5	15.2	12.1
Carrying too heavy a course load	2.00	4.8	3.20	6.4	9.25	10.9	12.8	12.2
Instructor was ineffective	2.87	6.8	8.50	17.0	7.83	9.2	7.8	6.5
Personal, Family or Illness Problems	3.20	7.6	5.00	10.0	7.75	9.1	16.5	13.9
Course objectives did not relate to student needs	3.00	7.2	1.33	2.7	7.5	8.8	14.5	9.2
Inadequately prepared for course	2.20	5.2	1.70	3.4	4.5	5.3	11.4	5.6
Disliked course	3.50	8.3	3.67	7.3	3.5	4.1	.3	4.9
Course demanded too much	0	0	2.53	5.0	2.75	3.2	.5	4.1
Financial problems	5.20	12.4	1.50	3.0	2	2.4	1.5	1.4
Transportation problems getting to class	.45	1.1	.50	1.0	1.5	1.8	1.2	.9
Too far behind - Grades too low	0	0	.20	.4	1.5	1.8	1.3	13.3
Moved out of area	0	0	0	0	1.5	1.8	2.0	1.2
Class equipment not readily available	.13	.3	0	0	1.5	1.7	.1	.1
Wanted to audit and could not	.50	1.2	.33	.7	1	1.2	.1	0
Was able to test out of course	0	0	0	0	1	1.2	.1	.1
Was accepted for transfer to another college	1.00	2.4	0	0	.25	.3	.9	1.0
Course(s) cancelled	0	0	2.00	4.0	0	0	.4	.2
Text arrived too late	0	0	.50	1.0	0	0	.1	0
Did not like facilities	0	0	1.00	2.0	0	0	0	0
Cost of course was too high	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Entered Military service	0	0	0	0	0	0	.1	0
Registration Error	0	0	0	0	0	0	.1	.1
Did not like students in course	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	.2
TOTAL	42	100.0	50	100.0	85	100.0	100.0	100.0

William Rainey Harper College
Algonquin and Roselle Roads
Palatine, Illinois 60067
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April/May 1984

Dear Northeasc Center Student:

We are surveying all students who withdrew from Harper College courses at Northeast Center during this last fall semester. The purpose of this study is to identify why students withdraw from courses at Northeast Center in order that we may better plan the offerings at our community center locations. We are asking your cooperation by completing the enclosed short questionnaire and returning it in the stamped addressed envelope provided with this letter.

Thank you for your assistance.

Very truly yours,
WILLIAM RAINEY HARPER COLLEGE

John A. Lucas

John A. Lucas, Director
Planning and
Institutional Research

JAL:jc
Enclosure

NORTHEAST CENTER STUDENT WITHDRAWAL SURVEY

1. What is the principal reason you withdrew from this course(s) or from Harper? Check (✓) the one principal reason.

_____ A. The course objectives did not relate to my needs.
_____ B. The times the course met proved to be too inconvenient
_____ C. The instructor(s) were ineffective
_____ D. Personal, family or illness problems
_____ E. Job pressures or I was offered a new job
_____ F. I am moving out of the area
_____ G. I was inadequately prepared for course
_____ H. Transportation problems getting to Harper
_____ I. Financial problems
_____ J. Was carrying too heavy of a course load
_____ K. Was accepted for transfer to another college
_____ L. Course(s) was canceled.
_____ M. Northeast Center location was too inconvenient
_____ N. Too far behind - grades were too low
_____ O. Course demanded too much
_____ P. Wanted to audit and couldn't
_____ Q. Disliked course
_____ R. Text arrived too late
_____ S. Entered military
_____ T. Was able to test out of course
_____ U. Registration error
_____ V. Other (specify)_____
_____
_____

2. What was your withdrawal status in the fall at Northeast Center? Check (✓) one

_____ A. Withdrew from one course, but was still enrolled at Harper.
_____ B. Withdrew from more than one course, but was still enrolled at Harper.
_____ C. Completely withdrew from Harper College.

If C, do you plan to return to Harper? _____ Yes _____ No

3. When did you see a counselor? Check (✓) one

_____ A. This semester
_____ B. Past semesters
_____ C. Never saw a counselor

4. How did you register for your course(s) at Northeast Center?

_____ A. By telephone
_____ B. In person

5. General comments about courses at Northeast Center_____
_____
_____
_____

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